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New Tools to Enhance Family Storytelling

The New York Public Library opens a treasure of old photos

BY ANNA FREDRICKS

What if you could access thousands of high-resolution photographs, maps, manuscripts, streaming video, and more, with the freedom to enjoy and reuse these materials in almost limitless ways?

On January 6, the New York Public Library released over 187,000 digital items into the public domain for high-resolution download from the library's Digital Collections web site. This release spans the breadth and depth of the library's holdings, from photographs, street scenes, historic maps and atlases, and illuminated manuscripts to sheet music and even fabrics.

No permission is required to use these items. Tools, project ideas, and explorations designed to inspire your own creations are available on the library's web site. A blog post series provides examples of what is possible.

Collections of interest

If your focus is Swedish-specific, photograph collections on immigration and for each U.S. state, stereoscopic views of Centennial celebrations and historic exhibitions, and pictures of military uniforms will be particularly interesting.

Immigration

From 1880 to 1900, an estimated 485,000 Swedes were received at Castle Garden and Ellis Island. The library's public domain release includes *stereoscopic views* for Castle Garden and the Battery, and for Ellis Island. An engineering collection focuses on the building of the Statue

of Liberty. Take a look at the photographs, using the horizontal arrows to turn pages. This image portrays a familiar view of the immigrant experience at Ellis Island.



Immigrants being served a free meal at Ellis Island.

Stereoscopic views

After the American Civil War, exhibitions became influential social and cultural events. The Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, celebrated the 100th anniversary of signing the Declaration of Independence. Exhibits featured agriculture, art, education and science, horticulture, machinery, manufacturing, and mining and metallurgy.



Swedish School House, International Exposition, from Pennsylvania, 1876.

Then the Chicago Columbian Exposition, held in 1893, had a profound effect on architecture, sanitation, the arts, and American industrial optimism.

Swedish communities in America celebrated their heritage at these grand events. Stereoscopic views of the Centennial Exhibition include photographs like this Swedish school house.

You will find images of events such as the Great Swedish (Scandinavian) parade, Swedes Day, at the Chicago Columbian Exposition. This event celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World.



Great Swedish Parade, Swedes Day, 1893 Columbian Exposition.

Photographs for most U.S. states – from buildings, parks, and transportation to science and industry, natural wonders and Native Americans – are also in this release. Discovering the 1898 Gold Rush in a collection reminded me of a great-uncle who left Minnesota to prospect for gold in Alaska. Two years later, he returned broke.



Prospectors returning to camp - 62 degrees below zero, Alaska, 1898-1900.

Military uniforms

Many of us have family members who were professional soldiers in Sweden. The *Vinkhuijzen* collection of military uniforms visualizes how soldiers appeared in uniform and performed in the call of duty.

This color collection for Norway and Sweden is grouped by ranges of years, from 1500-1756 to 1897-1904. Included are military personnel in uniform, cavalymen on horses, battle scenes, medals, and more.



Swedish Soldiers from the 1808 war with Russia.

Explore this collection in two easy steps:

1. Go to the library's collections home page and enter 'military' as a search term. Click on the *Vinkhuijzen* collection of military uniforms' box.
2. On the left, select 'Norway and Sweden'. Then browse through the collection.

The art of the possible

No story is too small; stories shape our lives. The art of storytelling is evolving, with a growing urgency to

preserve human stories. The New York Public Library's public domain release can help extend pictures with images that evoke past times and create a more authentic backdrop for a family's history. This is an opportunity to discover the collections and find inspiration for using them in your own research and creative practice.

A complementary story may emerge from tapping into a collection. Historical photographs of neighborhoods, construction projects, and even street vendors make me wonder what our families must have thought when they left Ellis Island and encountered the city for the first time. Look at activities on streets below 14th Street in Manhattan at that time to see what we may have missed in our stories.



14th Street, New York, in 1891.

Remember my great uncle? Few stories survived after his return. Photos from the Alaska collection (1898-1900)⁷ may help to reconstruct the environment that he lived in during his Alaska venture.

Now take a look at some of the library's first 'remix' projects – which demonstrate the real power of these tools. The tour of *Fifth Avenue, Then & Now* juxtaposes 1911 wide angle photographs with Google Street Views, while *Ride the Staten Island Railway through the Public Domain* takes you on a historic trip down the Staten Island Railroad.

The creativity doesn't stop there. Today, blog post entries on the library's web site share how digital images – once considered 'the end of the line' – have been repurposed, becoming paper, murals, wallpaper, and fabric. Many of the images can be ordered as art prints for display.

A series of blog posts promotes the value of finding inspiration from library collections in your own research. The notion of creating a book

of photographs and postcards with memories of family vacations has crossed my mind. One blog post caught my eye: *Using Postcards for Local History Research*. This and other entries enable the creative

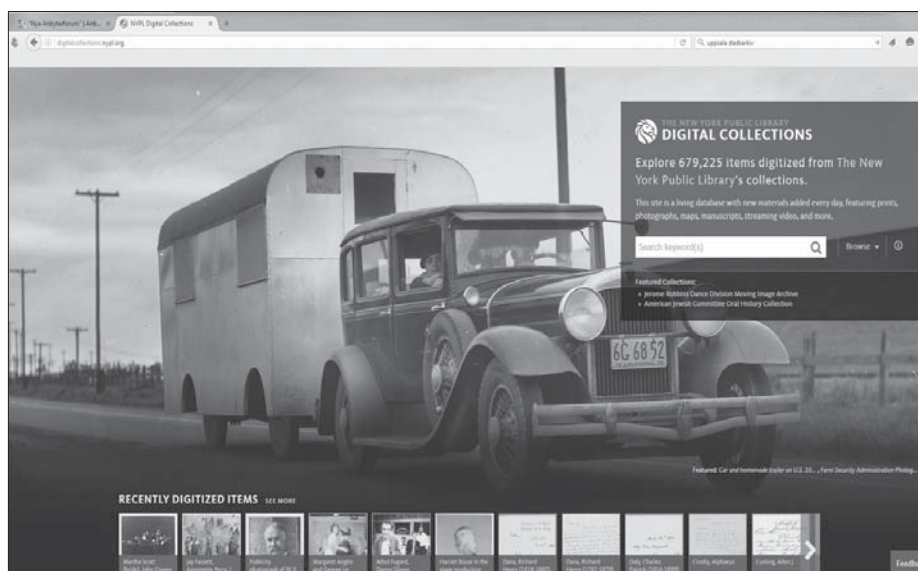
reuse of public domain materials, with intent to facilitate sharing, research, and reuse by all.

The New York Public Library's public domain release is all about enabling this creativity. By combining our photographs and images with pictures from diverse sources – in new and interesting ways – we can capture the experiences we hold in our minds and turn them into more compelling stories. The right story and photographs paired with historical context can breathe life into old pictures, preserve human stories, and help build a living history.

All pictures in this articles are from the New York Public Library

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Links on p. 30!



This is the starting page for the NYPL Digital collections (the picture in the background may be different). The white space to the right is where you put in your searches, and then click on the symbol.

When you have found the item you are looking for, click on it and it becomes larger. Scroll down a little and you will see some resolution buttons, click on one of them, and you will see your picture and you can now save it to wherever you want.

Andrew Peterson's homestead in Carver County, Minn. lives on.

In an article in SAG 2008:2 the story of Anders Pettersson was told by Anders Köhler.

But who was this Anders Pettersson, one of the more than 500 Anders Petterssons found in *Emibas*?

This man was a very special man,



Andrew Peterson in his old age.

who, born in 1818 in Västra Ryd (Östg.), came to America already in 1850. He first settled in Iowa, but around 1854 he moved to Carver County, Minnesota, where he claimed land and started to farm at Rock Isle Farm, half a mile east of Waconia. By then he was using his Americanized name Andrew Peterson. But so far his story is not unusual.

The remarkable thing about Andrew is that he wrote a diary which he started already on the voyage from Sweden to America, and kept on writing until just before his death in 1898. The many volumes of his diaries are now kept in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, MN, where they were discovered in the later 1940s by two famous Swedish writers, *Astrid Lindgren* and *Vilhelm Moberg*. Astrid Lindgren never used this material in her own writings, she just enjoyed the study of older methods of farming. But for Vilhelm Moberg it was different. It was an important part of the research, which later became his *Emigrant* epos during the 1950s.

The farm in Waconia lives

Andrew Peterson and his wife Elsa Ingman had nine children, but none of them married and none had children to take over the farm, so it went out of the family.

Now there was a happy news article in the *Tidningen* 2016/1 (the quarterly newsletter of the Swedish Genealogical Society of Minnesota) in which it was told that the Carver County Historical Society (CCHS) recently is deeded 51 acres of the Peterson homestead by Ward Holasek, who had owned it for some years. The CCHS later was able to exchange the large area of land to a smaller area just covering the Peterson homestead. The CCHS is now working on plans to restore some of the buildings, first a huge barn, now almost falling down. There are plans to also restore the gardens and maybe keep poultry and small livestock, that can be used for schoolchildren to learn about their ancestors' lives in the area.

Elisabeth Thorsell